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Official Records

90th plenary meeting
Friday, 31 January 1997, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Razali Ismail ..... (Malaysia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Tribute to the memory of the late President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, His Excellency Mr. Amata Kabua

The President: Before we begin our consideration of the item on the agenda for this morning, the General Assembly will pay tribute to the memory of the late President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, His Excellency Mr. Amata Kabua.

On behalf of the General Assembly, I should like to convey our heartfelt condolences to the Government and the people of the Marshall Islands and to the bereaved family.

I invite representatives to stand and observe a minute of silence in tribute to the memory of the late President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silence.

The President: I call on the representative of Myanmar, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Asian States.

Mr. Mra (Myanmar): On behalf of the Member States of the Group of Asian States, I wish to express our profound sadness over the passing of His Excellency President Amata Kabua, Head of State of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, on the morning of 20 December 1996, in Honolulu, Hawaii.

President Amata Kabua was the founding father and eminent leader of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and his long political career was devoted to the service of his country. The fact that President Amata Kabua served for five consecutive terms as President and Head of State of the Republic of the Marshall Islands is a clear manifestation of the high esteem in which he is held by his people and in his country.

His lifetime of devotion and commitment to his country demonstrate to us all that a dedicated patriot can make fundamental and positive changes in the life of a nation. His demise is truly a great loss to the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

On behalf of the Member States of the Group of Asian States, I should like to request through you, Mr. President, and through the delegation of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, to convey to the bereaved members of the family of President Amata Kabua and to the Government and the people of the Republic of the Marshall Islands our deepest and most heartfelt condolences.

The President: I now call on the representative of Romania, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Mr. Gorita (Romania): In my capacity as Chairman of the Group of Eastern European States for the month of January, I join the previous speaker in expressing to the Government and the people of the Marshall Islands our

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deepest condolences on the passing on 20 December 1996 of the Head of State of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, His Excellency President Amata Kabua.

The same sentiments go to the family of the late President of the Marshall Islands and to all those who had the privilege to know him and to work under his leadership.

President Kabua served with particular distinction and sense of duty, beginning his political life in 1950. He held many national and regional positions, such as the chairmanship of the South Pacific Forum and the chancellorship of the University of the South Pacific. He had been President of his country since 1979 and was re-elected to a fifth term in 1995.

We would like to ask the delegation of the Marshall Islands to convey to the Government, to the people of the country and to the entire family of the late President Amata Kabua our sentiments of solidarity and compassion.

The President: I now call on the representative of Nicaragua who will speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Mr. Castellón Duarte (Nicaragua) (*interpretation from Spanish*): On behalf of the countries of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, I would like to express our great sorrow and our deepest sympathy to the Government and the people of the Marshall Islands on the passing of His Excellency Mr. Amata Kabua, father of his country, leader and President of that nation. We would also like to extend our condolences to the bereaved family.

His Excellency President Kabua began his successful political career at an early age, distinguishing himself as one of the great forgers of the independence and nationhood of the Marshall Islands. Very early on, his name, political path and goodwill transcended the borders of his native country. He occupied various international and regional posts, such as the chairmanship of the South Pacific Forum, where his actions and initiatives were always welcomed and well conceived.

As a result of his hard work and leadership on behalf of his homeland and his people, we was able very early on to win the gratitude and recognition of his fellow citizens, who elected him Head of State and President of the Republic.

We therefore join in this well-deserved special tribute to his memory in which we express our regret at his passing.

The President: I now call on the representative of Denmark, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States.

Mr. Kimberg (Denmark): It is with profound sadness that I pay tribute to the memory of His Excellency President Amata Kabua of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, who passed away on 20 December 1996 in Honolulu, Hawaii.

President Amata Kabua earned widespread respect in the international community and enjoyed exceptional moral authority in his country and abroad. His entire life, he worked singularly and unselfishly in the service of the Marshall Islands and their people. President Amata Kabua devoted his life first and foremost to his dream of freedom for the Marshallese people. Under his leadership, the Marshall Islands regained their independence in 1979 and he became the Republic's first and only President, a position to which he was re-elected four times. He truly was a distinguished statesman and the founding father of the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

The Marshall Islands have had a long, turbulent history. President Amata Kabua once wrote:

> "Our society has survived and withstood the test of time, the impact of other cultures, the devastation of war, and the high price paid for the purpose of international peace and security."

The Marshall Islands have emerged from these adversities not only as a free and independent people, but also with full dignity and with an unharmed culture and identity, in large part due to the lifelong dedication and leadership of Amata Kabua.

I would like to conclude by expressing my Group's sincere and heartfelt condolences and feelings of sympathy to First Lady Emlain Kabua and the bereaved family and to the Government and the people of the Republic of the Marshall Islands at the immense and tragic loss they have suffered.

The President: I now call on the representative of Côte d'Ivoire, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States.

Mr. Bamba (Côte d'Ivoire) (*interpretation from French*): We were deeply shocked to learn of the death on 20 December 1996 of His Excellency Mr. Amata Kabua, President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. This event was a source of profound sorrow to the African Group, on whose behalf I have the honour to pay tribute to the late leader.

President Amata Kabua, whom we shall all miss, had a long political career, which began in 1950 and was marked by important milestones from that time until the Marshall Islands achieved independence in May 1979. Quite naturally, he then became President of his country and served five successive terms in that post until his death on 20 December.

President Amata Kabua, to whom we pay tribute today, was a man of vision, a charismatic leader beloved of his people, whom he loved in return. He was above all an intelligent leader, a statesman endowed with great wisdom. He built the modern Marshall Islands, where he completed many high-quality infrastructure projects and promoted the emergence of democracy. Furthermore, thanks to his political skills, his country, though small in size, has maintained balanced relationships with its various partners in an arena dominated by economic giants and great political Powers.

In recognition of his merits and tireless contributions to strengthening international peace and security, he was elected Chairman of the South Pacific Forum and was honoured with the chancellery of the University of the South Pacific.

Throughout his life, President Amata Kabua spared no effort to defend the interests of his people. Enhancing his compatriots' well-being upholding the dignity of his people were the guiding principles of his political activities. The passing of President Amata Kabua certainly represents an irreparable loss, not only to the people of the Marshall Islands, but also to all peace-loving nations. That is why it is difficult today to find the right words to alleviate the justified sorrow of the people of the Marshall Islands and to reflect our own emotions at this sad time.

Speaking of the problems of his own people, President Kabua himself once said:

> "Our society has survived and withstood the test of time, the impact of other cultures, the devastation of war, and the high price paid for the purpose of international peace and security."

There is therefore no doubt in our minds that the worthy people of the Marshall Islands will take solace in the thoughts of their late leader and thus be able to look to the future with confidence and to continue the important work of nation-building initiated by President Amata Kabua.

Thus, on behalf of the African Group, I should like in these sad circumstances to address to His Excellency Mr. Kunio Lemari, acting President of the Marshall Islands, to the people of the Marshall Islands and to Mrs. Emlain Kabua and her children our sincere condolences and the expression of our profound sympathy and undaunted solidarity at this difficult time.

The President: I now call on the representative of the United States of America, who will speak on behalf of the host country.

Mr. Gnehm (United States of America): On behalf of the United States of America, may I express my sincere condolences to the people of the Marshall Islands on this very sad occasion.

President Kabua was, in every sense of the word, the founding father of his country, the first — and until his death, only — President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. As such, President Kabua led his country and people through times of great transition. At the time of his death, he was Chairman of the South Pacific Forum as well as Chancellor of the University of the South Pacific.

The United States and the Marshall Islands have deep historic ties, which were forged in the Second World War, and so our sadness today is particularly deeply felt. The Trust Territory of the Pacific, which the United States administered under a United Nations strategic mandate, was transformed under President Kabua's leadership. In 1986, the Compact between the United States and the Republic of the Marshall Islands came into effect. As a freely associated State, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, under President Kabua's guidance, maintained a special and close relationship with the United States. We treasured this close relationship and deeply regret the death of our dear friend.

And now our two nations are dealing with new threats, which we must tackle together: nuclear proliferation, international money laundering and global environmental degradation. We were pleased that the new President, Imata Kabua, pledged to carry on in the

tradition of his cousin, the late President, by pledging an independent judiciary, private-sector development and continued good relations between our two countries. These goals are noble indeed, and nothing could be a more fitting tribute to the late President Kabua's memory.

The President: I now call on the Permanent Representative of the Marshall Islands.

Mr. Edwards (Marshall Islands): It is a great honour for my country to be allowed this occasion and to have the General Assembly commemorate the passing of our dear President, His Excellency Amata Kabua. He was our first President and the faith of our peoples in his guidance was shown by his re-election to the Presidency on five consecutive occasions.

In many ways, President Kabua can be described as the father of the modern Marshallese nation. He was at the forefront of the movement to regain our independence during the Trusteeship period and was instrumental in the process of regaining our sovereignty and dignity as a nation. He was not only the highest elected Government official at the service of the people, but also the highest traditional leader of the Marshall Islands.

He was one of the true great leaders of the Pacific island countries, and our loss has been felt throughout the region. When he died he was Chancellor of the University of the South Pacific and Chairman of the South Pacific Forum. He carried out his duties until the very end, going on a state visit to Japan to open the Pacific Centre in Tokyo on behalf of all the Forum member countries.

One of his great legacies to our country has been the institution of the democratic process. On 16 January his successor was democratically elected by the Marshall Islands Parliament. His Excellency President Imata Kabua, who was elected Senator from Kwajalein atoll, has vowed to continue the work of his predecessor and cousin until the end of his current presidential term.

I thank the General Assembly on behalf of the Government and the people of the Marshall Islands, and also on behalf of the family of the late President, Amata Kabua, for honouring us by paying tribute to the memory of our great leader.

Agenda item 119 *(continued)*

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of expenses of the United Nations (Article 19 of the Charter) (A/51/780 and Add.1)

The President: In document A/51/780, the Secretary-General informs the Assembly that 43 Member States are in arrears in the payment of their financial contributions to the United Nations within the terms of Article 19 of the Charter.

In document A/51/780/Add.1, the Secretary-General informs the Assembly that, since the issuance of his communication in document A/51/780, dated 21 January 1997, Armenia and Venezuela have made the necessary payments to reduce their arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

I should further like to remind delegations that, under Article 19 of the Charter,

> "A Member of the United Nations which is in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions to the Organization shall have no vote in the General Assembly if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two full years."

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of this information?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 8 *(continued)*

Adoption of the agenda of the fifty-first regular session of the General Assembly and organization of work

Request for the inclusion of an additional item

Note by the Secretary-General (A/51/236)

The President: In his note circulated in document A/51/236, the Secretary-General has the honour to request, pursuant to rule 15 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, the inclusion in the agenda of the fifty-first session of an item entitled "Financing of the Military Observer Group of the United Nations Mission for Verification of Human Rights and of Compliance with the Commitments of the Comprehensive Agreement on Human Rights in Guatemala".

Owing to the nature of the item, the Secretary-General further requests that the item be allocated to the Fifth Committee.

Unless I hear any objection, may I take it that the General Assembly agrees, in view of the urgency of the matter and under the circumstances of the present case just described, that the provision of rule 40 of the rules of procedure, which would require a meeting of the General Committee on the question of the inclusion of this item on the agenda, can be waived?

It was so decided.

The President: May I take it that the General Assembly, on the proposal of the Secretary-General, wishes to include an item in the agenda of the current session entitled "Financing of the Military Observer Group of the United Nations Mission for Verification of Human Rights and of Compliance with the Commitments of the Comprehensive Agreement on Human Rights in Guatemala"?

It was so decided.

The President: May I take it that the General Assembly wishes to allocate this item to the Fifth Committee?

It was so decided.

The President: The Chairman of the Fifth Committee will be informed of the decision just taken.

Request for the reopening of the consideration of agenda item 18 (a) (Appointment of members of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions)

Note by the Secretary-General (A/51/101/Add.1)

The President: In his note, contained in document A/51/101/Add.1, the Secretary-General informs the General Assembly that he has received notification of the resignations of Mr. Vijay Gokhale of India and Mr. Yuji Kumamaru of Japan from the membership of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, and that the Assembly will therefore be required at its current session to appoint two persons to fill the unexpired portion of the terms of office of Mr. Vijay Gokhale and Mr. Yuji Kumamaru — that is, until 31 December 1998.

In order to enable the General Assembly to take the required action, it will be necessary to reopen consideration of sub-item (a) of agenda item 18, entitled "Appointment of members of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions".

May I take it that the General Assembly, on the proposal of the Secretary-General, wishes to reopen consideration of sub-item (a) of agenda item 18, entitled "Appointment of members of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions"?

It was so decided.

The President: Representatives are aware that this sub-item was allocated to the Fifth Committee. However, in order for the Assembly to proceed expeditiously on this sub-item, may I take it that Assembly agrees to consider this sub-item directly in plenary immediately?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 18 *(continued)*

Appointments to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other appointments

(a) Appointment of members of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

Note by the Secretary-General (A/51/101/Add.1)

The President: The Assembly will now proceed to consider the appointment of two members to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions.

Mr. Kamal (Pakistan): We meet today to elect our representatives for two vacancies on the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) in an election that raises more questions than it provides answers.

First, the ACABQ is one of the most important bodies of the United Nations. This standing Committee of the General Assembly was set up to examine and report on the regular and peacekeeping budgets, the accounts of the United Nations and the administrative budgets of the specialized agencies. The Committee's mandate includes advice to the Assembly on other administrative and financial matters referred to it. It has assumed new

significance in the wake of the current financial crisis of the Organization.

We therefore have to take all precautions to ensure that our representatives on the Committee are experts who are well versed in both the political and the technical dimensions of their work. It is essential that the members on this body should have the experience and the expertise necessary to fulfil the onerous responsibility that the Committee is called upon to assume. There have been serious loopholes in the implementation of this principle.

Secondly, there must be a decent interval between vacancies and elections so that all Member States have sufficient notice to enable them to present candidates for election. Unfortunately, the hasty preparation for the current election to the ACABQ leaves much to be said about the processes and procedures that were adopted. This is hardly a desirable way to conduct the business of elections to one of the most important bodies of the United Nations, whatever its programme of impending meetings might have been.

Thirdly, it used to be a well-established practice that unfinished terms were normally completed by nominees of the incumbent countries. There was merit in that tradition. Of course, incumbent countries have an obligation to ensure that the replacement nominees that they put forward have the requisite qualifications and expertise; they must not presume that vacant posts can be filled by just any nominee of theirs. Unfortunately, the traditional practice has recently been challenged in several cases, leading to messy elections. We need to examine the desirability of consecrating the traditional practice somewhat further.

Finally, we have to constantly keep in mind the principle of reasonable rotation. An examination of the current composition of the ACABQ shows that there are some members that are totally permanent and many others that are semi-permanent. Obviously, Member States which send their nominees to the ACABQ for two decades or more consecutively can acquire astronomical expertise and unchallengeable tribal memories. But is it fair to exclude all the other countries — almost 170 of them — that may wish to acquire similar expertise or to make contributions of their own? Rotation is not a device for distributing leftover slices of the cake among Member States. It is an essential principle which enriches and diversifies our experience at the United Nations. The United Nations would be much the poorer if it developed a propensity to encourage semi-exclusive and quasi-permanent clubs. The ACABQ runs the risk of falling into that category. It would be useful therefore to analyse to what degree its composition falls within the principle of rotation.

We have embarked on an all-encompassing reform agenda. But one element conspicuously absent from it is our election processes. It would redound to our benefit if we sat together and analysed the current electoral processes, their reform and their ultimate adjustment to a changed milieu. The basic principle, of course, would be the Benthamite doctrine of the greatest good of the greatest number, leading to the enhanced participation of the general membership and the increased representation of the small and medium-sized States.

While we are happy to go along with the election of the persons nominated for the two unfinished terms on the ACABQ, I wanted to leave these ideas as food for thought for the General Assembly.

The President: I should now like to draw the attention of the Assembly to the note by the Secretary-General contained in document A/51/101/Add.1, paragraph 2 of which reads as follows:

> "The Government of India has nominated Mr. Syed Akbaruddin and the Government of Japan has nominated Mr. Fumiaki Toya to fill these vacancies."

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to appoint Mr. Syed Akbaruddin and Mr. Fumiaki Toya as members of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions for a term of office beginning 31 January 1997 and ending 31 December 1998?

It was so decided.

The President: May I take it that the Assembly decides to conclude its consideration of sub-item (a) of agenda item 18?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 10.45 a.m.